Case study: Placing soft skills at the heart of community learning

# Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment (OTLA 3) South Central programme, 2017/18: attainment, retention, and progression

## Which organisations were involved?

Community learning services for 5 of the unitary Berkshire authorities: West Berkshire, Reading, Bracknell, Wokingham and Slough (including Windsor and Maidenhead).

## What was the purpose?

The current dominant hard, ‘objective’ outcome measures required by evidence-based policy-making for the further education system, like qualifications, progression rates into further learning and/or employment, do not capture progress and outcomes in soft skills or the contribution community learning makes in helping learners develop these skills.

This project developed a tool to measure soft skills progress and outcomes in in accredited and non-accredited courses that the 5 participating community learning services measure could use to inform their future curriculum offers and demonstrate the impact of community learning.

## What did the project do?

The project:

* Developed a more needs-led approach to curriculum planning and delivery by involving learners in their soft skills targets.
* Developed and piloted an impact tool to be used at the start, mid-point and end of courses. This was produced in visual and linear formats to meet the needs of different learners.
* Set up a working group using a Facebook group and Google Community, to develop community learning tutors’ confidence and skills in addressing the needs of vulnerable learners.
* Shared and built on their existing planning and impact measurement practice.

## What helped the project succeed?

Teachers said they benefitted from time away from their institutions and taking a collaborative approach to thinking about their teaching practice with other teachers. Many said they had become more reflective and more aware of soft skills and the impact they have.

## What challenges did the project face?

The community-based nature of provision was a challenge for teacher collaboration, even with a Facebook group and Google Community.

## What difference did it make?

A learner feedback survey, with separately analysed results for linear and visual versions of the tool, found:

* learners recognised the importance of measuring soft skills (visual 100%, linear 83%)
* learners said the layout was clear (visual 93%, linear 94%)
* returning learners preferred this tool to individual learning plans they used previously (visual 75%, linear 78%).

The project established a network of teachers who created a culture of collaboration and support that will promote future joint working across curriculum areas and local authorities.

## Where can I find more information?

You can find out more about this project:

* By contacting West Berkshire Community Learning Team: email: aclteam@westberks.gov.uk | Tel. 01635 519060 | Twitter: @WBerksLearning
* In the ETF [Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment 3: South Central. Final Report](https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3023) (undated).